Actors’ Playhouse
and
Palm Beach Dramaworks
announce

Coproduction of *The Belle of Amherst*
for Online Streaming, April 2-6
Starring Margery Lowe

CORAL GABLES, Fla. – February 18, 2021 – Actors’ Playhouse Artistic Director David Arisco and Palm Beach Dramaworks Producing Artistic Director William Hayes are pleased to announce that their companies are joining forces on a virtual coproduction of *The Belle of Amherst*, William Luce’s one-woman play based on the life of Emily Dickinson. Margery Lowe portrays the enigmatic poet and Hayes directs. The show will be filmed on PBD’s mainstage, without the presence of an audience, and will be streamed from April 2-6.

“We’re very excited to be working together and mounting a full production even as our theatres remain closed,” said Arisco and Hayes in a joint statement. “We’ve both done a lot of virtual play readings during the pandemic, and we wanted to try something different, to bring a full production into people’s homes. We want to set an example of two organizations that are moving forward and figuring out new ways to do things. We’ve known each other for a long time, and we share a mutual respect – for each other, and for each other’s work. So, it just seemed like a no-brainer at this moment in time to do a co-pro and share our talents, our ideas, and, of course, the costs.”

Tickets are $30, and all proceeds benefit Actors’ Playhouse and PBD, supplying much-needed revenue at a time when the theatres are earning no income. Once a ticket is purchased, the play can be viewed at the ticket holder’s convenience any time from April 2-6.

Patrons who subscribed to the 2020-2021 season of either company and did not ask for a refund, rolling over their subscription to the 2021-2022 season, get to watch for free. “It’s a thank you for having trust and confidence in our organizations,” said Arisco and Hayes.

The shutdown of theatres last March compelled artistic directors all over the country to consider new ways to deliver content to their audiences. In Florida, it also prompted them to talk and brainstorm. “It seems logical that we’re entering a new era for regional theatre,” said Arisco, who will participate in some rehearsals and be present during
filming. “The need for co-pros and collaboration now seems more evident. We realize we’re not antagonists, we’re not competing. This could lead to future coproductions when we’re back in our theatres, because even though we share a region and we share critics, we don’t share an audience.”

Hayes has been advocating for collaboration and unity among Florida companies for years, and the pandemic strengthened his resolve to reach out. “Almost immediately after everyone shut down, I started talking with management of theatre companies that I’d rarely communicated with before,” said Hayes, who coproduced the 2019 world premiere of *Ordinary Americans* with GableStage. “Now we’re sharing things that we should have been sharing long ago. During a pandemic, the lessons we should learn are to celebrate unity and the strength of our community.”

Hayes and Arisco chose *The Belle of Amherst* for their first coproduction for reasons artistic and pragmatic. The play tells the story of the independent, reclusive, witty poet through her letters, verse, and the playwright’s rich imagination, interweaving the voices of friends, family, and acquaintances to create a vivid portrait of the artist. Luce, who adored Dickinson’s poetry, called his play “a love affair with language, a celebration of all that is beautiful and poignant in life.” He penned those words in an author’s note in the published version of the play, and also said he wrote the piece hoping to “depict an individualist of the highest order” and “the humanity and reasonableness of Emily Dickinson’s life.”

The play is a showcase for a gifted actress – Julie Harris originated the role on Broadway in 1976 and won a Tony Award – and Arisco and Hayes believe they have the ideal artist in Lowe, who portrayed Dickinson in PBD’s world premiere production of Joseph McDonough’s comic fantasia *Edgar & Emily*. “Margery is a lovely actress, and she has a great warmth onstage,” said Arisco. “She’s an interesting combination of maturity and youthfulness in her performances, so she’s a terrific choice.” Hayes added, “Having seen Marge embody Dickinson in a very different play, and having developed a professional bond over 15 years and numerous productions, I know she has the range, the skill set, and the artistry to pull this off brilliantly.”

Michael Amico is the set designer, Brian O’Keefe is the costume designer, Kirk Bookman is the lighting designer, and Roger Arnold is the sound designer.

From a practical standpoint, a large cast during the pandemic was out of the question; Arisco and Hayes needed to do a one- or two-person play of substance. Actors’ Equity Association has very stringent rules and procedures that must be adhered to, and Hayes said PBD spent thousands of dollars to get special union-approved filters that will purify the air in the theatre. “That’s just one indication of the many rigorous protocols we – and Actors’ Playhouse – plan to implement when audiences return to our theatres.”

Anyone uncertain as to whether they’re subscribed to the upcoming season of PBD or Actors’ Playhouse, or wishes to subscribe now to receive a free ticket to *The Belle of
Amherst, should call PBD’s box office at 561.514.4042, x2, or Actors’ Playhouse box office at 305.444.9293.

Arisco and Hayes are planning to announce their 2021-2022 seasons in the next few weeks. “It’s our way of saying, ‘We’re still here, we’re still creating art, and we’d love your attendance when you feel comfortable,’” they said.

For technical reasons, tickets can be purchased only through PBD’s website: www.palmbeachdramaworks.org or box office: 561.514.4042, x2.

About Palm Beach Dramaworks
Palm Beach Dramaworks is a professional, not-for-profit theatre company founded in 2000 and located in the heart of downtown West Palm Beach. Each season, the award-winning company produces five mainstage shows and offers a wide variety of programs for students at the theatre, in schools, and online. Committed to fostering the future of theatre, PBD has become a hub for playwrights in Florida and around the country to nurture their work through initiatives including Drama(in the)works and the annual New Year/New Plays Festival. PBD is a member of Theatre Communications Group, Florida Professional Theatres Association, and the Cultural Council of Palm Beach County. www.palmbeachdramaworks.org

About Actors’ Playhouse at the Miracle Theatre
Actors’ Playhouse is an award-winning nonprofit regional professional theatre company celebrating 33 years of artistic excellence. Located in the historic Miracle Theatre on Miracle Mile in downtown Coral Gables, Actors’ Playhouse is a Florida Presenting Cultural Organization and one of 13 major cultural institutions in Miami-Dade County. The company produces five Mainstage and four professional Children’s Theatre productions annually, a year-round Theatre Conservatory and Summer Camp Program, educational arts outreach programs, and the Young Talent Big Dreams countywide youth talent contest in partnership with The Children’s Trust. To learn more about Actors’ Playhouse, visit www.ActorsPlayhouse.org.